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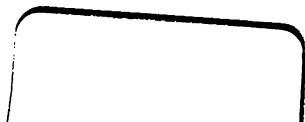
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"I sat down to arrange my violets, . . . when voices near me attracted my attention."—p. 13.

A

VIOLET IN THE SHADE.

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF "THE LITTLE PEATCUTTERS," "LIGHT ON THE LILY,"
"A ROSE WITHOUT THORNS," ETC.

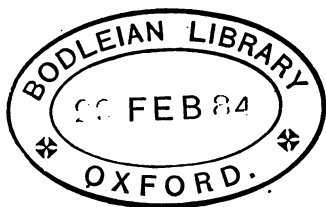
"Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth."

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A VIOLET IN THE SHADE.

Chapter I

The Wood on the Hill.



HERE are few people who do not know what a refreshing power there is in a bright spring day. Such days are not very many in our island home, for there are apt to be east winds to chill with a withering breath the flowers that would

lift their little heads, if only the south wind blew softly. And there are apt to be chill continuous rains, when the budding leaves are discouraged by too much cold moisture, and the birds fly to and fro from their nests with heavy wings, and shake the drops from their feathers, a hundred times in the course of a March morning. Yes, and there are apt to be days when snow-flakes dance about and fall in the very lap of May, and hang on the boughs of the orchard like the blossoms which are struggling into life and beauty, and lie on the daisied turf in feathery profusion.

But, in spite of all these days that come more or less frequently every spring time, there are still a few choice and beautiful ones, to awake in our hearts a glad thanksgiving and a loving warmth of praise, which I could not put into words if I tried. This fourteenth of

April was one. The air was soft and balmy though fresh and healthful, and I left a little town in Somersetshire behind me, and took a narrow lane leading to the crest of a low-lying hill, partly covered with wood and partly an open down, where sheep browsed and the horses of a neighbouring farmer were turned out for rest and "grass" at intervals.

Crossing this open bit of down, which was somewhat broken and irregular in places where limestone cropped up in fantastic shapes, I paused at a stile which led into the wood I have mentioned. The valley lying below me was bathed in the soft spring sunshine, and the sky above was of a clear deep blue, with lovely white clouds slowly moving in the horizon, and intensifying its colour between their snowy and varied forms. A blush of green and russet was upon the woods of a line of hills on the opposite side.

of the valley. The great minster towers were silvery gray in the light. The tops of the elm trees in the close were still bare, and a large company of rooks were wheeling round them, the black spots here and there showing that the nests were all ready for the young ones, so soon to be fledged. All these sights were beautiful, and what shall I say of the harmony of sounds—a tinkling brook near me coming down from the wood, the lowing of a cow, the twitter of happy little birds, the hum of the first early bee of the year! And this bee brings me to the scents as well as to the sounds.

As I sat on the stile, I became conscious of a most delicious fragrance, delicate and pure, like nothing else I can remember to have smelt before or since. The bee had found out whence it came, for after humming round me once or twice, he went

over the stile again, and I followed him. The ground sloped gently upwards, and I took the path by the side of the tinkling rill. The scent grew stronger. Presently I stopped, and there all up the slope of the copse, with the sunshine bringing out their fragrance and colour, I saw an innumerable company of violets. Such violets! with long stalks and heads gracefully set, with the modest droop with which we always think of a violet. Form, colour, scent, were they ever surpassed? Far out of reach—for few people passed that way,—the violets grew, and I can never forget them. Perhaps on bright April days they still grow there in lovely profusion; perhaps the copse is all cut down, and the place of the violets knows them no more, and careless feet tread roughly over the slope where once they flourished. I cannot tell, but over the long waste of years, these violets still

waft me their sweetness ; still fill me with a sense of their beauty ; still make me love that far-off day of early spring for their sakes.

I stayed a long time in the copse, and gathered a bunch of the sweet violets, carefully protecting them with their own green leaves, to bear them home in triumph. Then at last I turned to leave the hill, and go down to my home in the valley.

I may say in passing, that I never can bear to see flowers ruthlessly gathered, and then thrown down to die, or be trodden underfoot. Many a time I have stopped to pick up one lying forlorn on the wayside, and at least have lifted it on a hedge or bush to die.

This may seem to you a fancy of mine, but I think a Greek lady who wrote verses which have lived through centuries, had the same kind of reverence for the

life of a flower, as something too precious to be snatched rudely from its home, and left to be trodden underfoot on a dusty path.

When I returned to my stile again, I sat down for a few minutes to arrange my violets, quite comfortably, when voices near me attracted my attention. One a clear ringing voice, the other very low and gentle.

"It is all spite to say I sing out of tune," said the clear voice, "I don't; I know there was not a false note in the solo, and it is just Miss Price's spite."

"No, Elsie, I can't believe it, and besides——"

"Besides what?"

"Well, I think you did go out of tune on the upper G that evening; it's odd you could not hear it."

"I think it is grand, your setting yourself up for a judge, Violet; and I think it's

very hard that, because I wish to earn some money, and be useful to mother, and sing, every one should throw cold water on me. I say again it is pure spite." And the speaker rose suddenly, and saying,—“Come along, I shall go home now,” she passed close to me as I sat on the stile.

The two girls had been sitting on a felled tree, under the hedge, and now as they came in sight, I recognised them as the daughters of Mrs. Scott, the widow of an organist, who had died a few years before this time.

Mrs. Scott lived in a cottage in the Clerk's Close, just on the outskirts of the town, and had very delicate health, and was very poor. She was not what might be called a thrifty woman, and she had a languishing affected manner, which was against her. She had, poor thing, tried *so many* little expedients to eke out her

slender means. Dancing classes for the little children of the trades-people, but they failed. Then she tried to teach music ; but she had no patience, and a sharp slap given to the child of one of the leading lawyers in Minsterleigh destroyed her reputation.

I had been absent from Minsterleigh for more than three years, having let my house, that I might join an invalid sister abroad. Thus Mrs. Scott's girls had almost grown out of my knowledge, and I had passed out of their remembrance. But as our path now lay in the same direction, I called to them, as I let myself down from the stile, and said,—

“ Shall we not walk home together ? I daresay you have forgotten me.”

Instantly Elsie Scott's manner changed. “ Oh no ! ” she said pleasantly, “ I remember you, Miss Carmichael ; but I do not think Violet does.”

"Violet must have been a little girl when I went away, nearly three years ago, last October," I said, and then the sweet gentle face was raised to mine.

"I am nearly fifteen," Violet said, "but I do remember you."

There was no change in Violet's voice, there was no need to change it. Whereas Elsie had been ringing and defiant only a few minutes before, Violet's answers to her sister had been gentle. Violet was always Violet. Elsie had, like so many of us, two sides to her picture, or, shall I say "company manners." But she was a beautiful girl, and, as I had heard, was supposed to have inherited her father's talent for music. She played and even composed ; and had a fine quality of voice, but with a fatal inaccuracy sometimes, called "singing flat," which seemed to be hard, almost impossible, to overcome. *It was a sore subject with Elsie, and no*

wonder. She was ambitious, and thought she could make a sensation, and perhaps a fortune; and there was a terrible uncertainty about her upper notes; they were not always *true*, and worse than all, she did not always know when she sang false. Poor Elsie!



Chapter II

What Violet Did.

BEFORE we had got down into Minsterleigh, my two companions and I were on very friendly terms. It was not like beginning an acquaintance, but it was taking up an old friendship. For my friendship with their father had been very real, and he had given me many lessons, both on the piano and organ; that was in the far past, and I had much to learn from Elsie of the present.

Miss Price, whose name I had heard as cherishing "pure spite" against her, was a lady who had lately come to Minsterleigh, and who had a few girls under her charge. Elsie had been engaged by her

to assist in some of the musical teaching, and Miss Price had taken great interest in her. The subject of discussion at present was Elsie's power to undertake the solo in a part of the Messiah, which was to be performed in Minsterleigh Town Hall by the Choral Society, in aid of the rebuilding of a church in the neighbourhood which had been destroyed by fire. Elsie was most anxious to sing "Rejoice greatly," and Miss Price and the organist, Mr. Burton, whom I found afterwards was really much interested in her success, tried to dissuade her.

Unhappily for Elsie, her mother thought her singing perfect, and Violet's truthful criticisms were always resented.

"As if Violet knew." "Fancy Violet setting herself up as a judge," was always the conclusion of the whole matter; and Violet would be silenced, but not convinced.

Violet had been before me in the wood, and had gathered a large quantity of the flowers, for which she had wisely brought a basket; for the violets did not come upon her with the surprise they came upon me. She went to find them knowing that they would be there.

"The rehearsal will be to-morrow," Elsie said, "in the large practice room over the cloisters; will you come and hear it, Miss Carmichael?"

"I must consult Mr. Burton first," I said, "and ask his permission. I should like to come and see your mother this afternoon, if I may."

"Oh! please do," Elsie said. "Mamma will be charmed."

I bid my companion good-bye at the corner of the close, and as we parted little Violet said, "*Do* come," and I promised I would do so. As I was turning into the gate of my own house I saw Mr. Burton

rushing along the green with a roll of music in his hand.

"A lovely day!" he said, as every one did.

"A perfect spring day," I replied; "look at my violets; I have been to the top of Beryl, and found these in the copse there."

As I spoke I singled out a few of my precious flowers, and while I was forming them into a bunch with a broad green leaf, I said,—“Will you admit me to your rehearsal to-morrow evening, Mr. Burton?”

“With pleasure; you are an institution of the place, Miss Carmichael,” was the reply.

“I want to hear Elsie Scott sing.”

Mr. Burton laughed, and shook his head. “Ah!” he said, “has she been telling you of her successes? Poor child! it is a delusion. She will never be a certain

singer. It may pass in our little Minsterleigh audiences, but she has higher aims, and I know they are doomed to disappointment. Whether from some weakness in the throat, or from some radical defect in the ear, the higher notes may be right twice in a song, and then 'flat,' out of tune, in fact, and she is running up and down the passage, and does not know it. However, it will bring its own cure, and she will take to the piano, and there, I think, she will get on."

"Has the little sister any music in her?"

"Has she *not*?" Mr. Burton replied. "She is too young to sing much yet, and I verily believe she could sing more, only she would not seem to surpass her sister. She is the dearest little thing that ever lived, making every one happy if she can, but so unpretending and modest. Like her name," he suggested. "Like your

flowers. Many thanks for them," and he was gone.

I paid my visit in the afternoon, and found that time had but little altered Mrs. Scott. She opened the door to me, and was full of complainings and murmurings. It was so hard to get on. Miss Price had destroyed all chance of teaching for her, and her health forbad any other exertion. Elsie's musical genius was her hope,—and, she might add, her beauty also.

Would I patronise the concert?

"Yes, indeed," I said; "I had taken a ticket, and I hoped to be at the rehearsal also."

The Scotts' was a very small house in what was called the Clerk's Close, which was shut in by two gates, and consisted of some forty little dwellings standing opposite to each other, divided by a broad gravel road. From the room on the other

side of the passage I heard the sound of an old piano, and the dull thud of fingers going up the scale.

"I am sorry that noise is going on, but it is one of the penalties of poverty to live in a house where every sound is heard; it is one of the little Everards having a music lesson."

"From Elsie?" I asked.

"Oh dear, no, Miss Carmichael, from Violet. She is just fit to teach the rudiments of music, and Mr. Everard pays her thirty shillings a-quarter, which is something."

"It is, indeed," I said. And just then the outer door opened and shut, and the sound of little feet was heard pattering down the close, while Violet herself came in. She spoke to me, and then said,—
"May I go now, mother?"

"You must make some tea, first, Violet, for Miss Carmichael and me, and I hope

you are sure it is no infectious illness at the Gainors."

Violet laughed. "Rheumatism is not catching, mother." And she went away to get the tea.

"She is a very strange child," Mrs. Scott said, "not at all bright or pretty or clear like her sister, but very useful. We are reduced so much, we only have a woman in to clean in the morning, and Violet does a great deal of menial work. However," said Mrs. Scott philosophically, "we have all our proper places in this world. We can't all be geniuses like my Elsie."

I thought, though I did not say so, that it was well for the world that every one was not like Elsie, when she came in with a rapid excited movement soon after, and I heard her voice in the little passage calling Violet. Again it was high pitched, and not too pleasant.

“I want some tea,—quick, Violet, for I have to go to Mr. Burton’s at five! Make haste!”

Then she came into the sitting-room, and saw me. Her colour rose, and she said,—“I beg your pardon, Miss Carmichael; I did not know you were here.”

She knew her mother was there, I suppose; and the bounce and the loud voice were not attractive.

Mrs. Scott’s eyes, however, beamed with loving admiration at her child, who certainly looked very handsome. Her tall slight figure was set off by the close-fitting dark-blue serge, and a pretty hat with a long feather drooped over her thick golden-coloured plaits of hair. I rather wondered where the money to get the feather came from, and then I remembered Elsie taught music at Miss Price’s, and doubtless had a salary. Something was wanting in Elsie Scott; something was out of tune

and jarred; it was like the "flat upper G," it spoilt the whole to my mind; but then I am an old maid, and no great judge perhaps.

We talked for a few minutes, and then little Violet brought the tea and handed it, and Elsie condescended to get up and put some more milk into mine, and to show me a photograph of their only brother who was at sea.

Violet soon disappeared, and I heard the little door in the hall open and shut again. I followed soon, and, I confess, I was curious to know where the child was going. She had a little basket in her hand, the same in which she had placed the violets in the morning. I could not overtake her, but I got to the iron gate at the farther end of the Clerk's Close in time to see her little figure spinning lightly along toward some cottages in what we called Tor Lane. "Tor" is the old name for hill, a rising

ground, and there were a great many Tors in our part of the country.

I did not wish to be impertinent, and pry into what was no concern of mine; but I walked up Tor Lane, and passed the cottage at which Violet had stopped. The beauty of the spring evening tempted me on, and I took the path which wound along Tor Hill, through a plantation of fir trees. Just at my feet was the noble minster, and the palace and canons' houses; and Venus was hanging her silver lamp above the central tower of the grand old church. As I stood still to look and admire the scene, I heard the laughter of a child, and, turning my head, I saw my little Violet labouring up the hill path with a great fat child of three in her arms. A cottager's child, and dressed like one, with a short check frock and thick boots, in which a pair of socks had vanished, leaving bare two very stout red legs.

“Why, Violet, is it you again?” I said.

Violet was panting with her exertion, and, setting the child down, said, “Now,



VIOLET CARRIES SUSIE UP THE HILL.

Susie, you can walk.” Susie thrust her fingers into her mouth, and, awed by my presence, stopped her laughter and frolic.

"It is little Susie Gainor," she said; "her poor mother is very very ill with rheumatic fever, and Mark Gainor, one of the choristers, has broken his leg. There is no one to help them regularly, so I go in when I can; and Susie was making such a noise that I thought I would take her out for half-an-hour. Mrs. Gainor's head aches so dreadfully. Now, Susie, come; look, pick up these pretty fir cones, and come along."

I took one hand of the fat sturdy child, and Violet took the other, and so we pulled her up the hill.

"Mark Gainor is such a dear boy," Violet said, "and they have trouble upon trouble; the father died last Christmas, and the eldest brother, who lives with them, and has very good wages as a builder, is not very kind to them. Mrs. Gainor takes in washing, and gets on when she is well; but I do really begin to be afraid she won't

ever get well again. She has so much pain, and is so weak."

A long history of the Gainors followed, and never once did Violet speak of herself or her own doings.

She left me on our return at the door of the cottage, when she ran quickly home, and I promised to take Susie in to her mother and see if I could be of any use.

"The violet in the shade," I thought; "what may not a child of scarcely fifteen do if she is so inclined?"





Chapter III

Mark's Cottage.

IT was a very neat cottage where I found Susie's mother. She was propped up in bed in one corner of the room, into which the door opened, and a boy lay on a little sofa by the foot of the bed.

"Is that you, Miss Violet?" the boy said eagerly.

"No," I said, "but it is a friend of Miss Violet. I have brought back your little sister."

"Thank you, ma'am, I am sure," said a feeble voice from the bed, "I'm a bit easier now; the child was so full of her tricks, Miss Violet couldn't quiet her

nohow, so she took her out; but Annie Hicks will be in soon now, and put her to bed, poor lamb. There's your tea all set ready, my dear; Miss Violet never forgets."

"And look at the beautiful flowers she brought me," Mark said. "Don't they smell lovely, ma'am?"

"Miss Violet is one of a thousand," said the poor woman, "she is on the trot all day, for some one or other, and never no thanks."

"Mother, she doesn't want thanks from us,—she says so."

"I wasn't thinking of *us*, my dear; there's others who take advantage of her, bless her!"

"I wish I could go to the concert, ma'am," Mark said with feverish earnestness. "I hope Miss Scott will get through well, Miss Violet is in such a way about it."

"Is she?" I said.

"Oh yes; she says she believes Miss Elsie will never get over it, if she fails, and her voice isn't certain. But oh, ma'am, did you ever hear Miss Violet sing?"

"No," I said, "never. Can she sing?"

"I should think so," Mark said, "you should just hear her, only she never does sing except to me."

"My voice is gone now," he added, "my leg seems to have given me a shake all over; but Mr. Burton says when I get well he won't give me up, and he gives me lots of music to write out for him now."

The woman who looked after the two invalids now came in, and I said goodbye. All this time I did not *know* what was the secret spring of Violet's sweetness and goodness, but I guessed it. Did not the *violets* in the wood draw their nourish-

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of peace, and made her presence felt as I had felt the presence of the flowers, whose name she bore, in the wood that morning, by the silent fragrance of loving deeds.

I went to the rehearsal the next evening full of curiosity and interest. Elsie was in her glory, and everything went well—well to my less critical ears, though I saw a slight contraction of Mr. Burton's forehead sometimes. But, on the whole, "Rejoice greatly" went with precision.

The second part was secular music, and Elsie and one of Miss Price's pupils stood up to sing a duet from one of the operas, and Elsie followed with an English ballad, then very popular, and deservedly so, "Will he come?" There was a want of expression here, and a decided failure in the upper notes.

"The song does not suit her," Violet

whispered, who was sitting near me ; and I saw Mr. Burton close the piece of music impatiently. Then I saw, too, that Elsie was quite unaware that there had been anything wrong. She was full of triumph and delighted anticipation of praise, and played one of Mendelssohn's songs without words beautifully on the piano. It was the duet where the two spirits for good and evil hold such a long argument, as it always seems to me.

"That girl can play," said an old gentleman, as we were leaving the room. "Poor Scott's child, is she not ? A pity she tries to sing."

The old gentleman was a guest of the Dean's, and was, I knew, a real judge of music.

"It is a good quality of voice," he said to Mr. Cairns, who was with him, "but it's not always true."

Violet was near me in the narrow passage leading from the practice room, and put her dear little hand in mine.

"What do you think?" she asked. "Will she get through on Monday?"

"I hope so," I replied. "Will you come and see me to-morrow evening, Violet, and we will talk about it?"

"I don't know," she said, "thank you. I am afraid they will want me, but I will try to come," adding, "I should *like* to come."

"You *must* come," I said. "I want to talk to you about the Gainors; and, Violet, I want to hear you sing."

"I don't sing much, only to Mark since he broke his leg, and to old Mr. Browne, who is blind; and sometimes, when he asks me, to Mr. Burton."

"Well," I said, "I shall expect you to-morrow evening at seven o'clock. You can run round by the upper gate of the

close, and in at my back garden door. I will leave it open for you."

The minster chimes had just sounded at seven o'clock the next evening, when my maid opened the door, and said,—
"Here is little Miss Scott, ma'am."

Little Miss Scott was singularly youthful in appearance, and I did not wonder at my maid's adjective. Her long brown hair floated on her shoulders, and was tied back from the forehead with a band of crimson ribbon. Her dress was a plain brown serge, with very neat white linen collar and cuffs. As I looked at her I thought, "Jenny Wren or Madam Robina Redbreast liveries describe her."

"Well, Violet, I am so glad you are come. We will have a long evening. See, there is a nice little chair for you by the fire, and we will look at some of my photographs till tea is ready."

Violet had not the least awkward shy-

ness about her, though she was so quiet and gentle. Her delight with the pictures was so innocent and pretty ; and she said suddenly, " It must be nice to live in a pretty room like yours, and have so many lovely things."

My "pretty room" was a very simple one, furnished after my own taste, but it looked pleasant enough by the light of a lamp and the fitful blaze of a wood fire, which the chill evening of early spring in England makes so welcome.

My "lovely things" had mostly been collected in my travels, or were relics of my old life at Minsterleigh, where my father had been for many years a canon of the minster.

After tea we went back into the drawing-room, and, opening my piano, I began to play. Violet, who was bending over my photograph-book, raised her head and listened, and then, softly clos-

ing it, she came near me and stood by as I played. The Messiah was before me, and I began the well-known air, "He shall feed His flock." Looking up at her, I said,—“Sing to me, Violet, as you sing to old Mr. Browne and Mark.”

I confess I was not prepared for the beautiful low, sweet voice which then, at my bidding, poured forth the familiar strains of that matchless song.

When once the ice was broken, the girl sang on. It was no effort to her, no strain; no, it was the melody pent up within her finding vent. Song after song I played, and Violet sang. I made no remark, I was afraid of breaking the spell. My portfolio was lying behind Handel's Messiah, and I turned it over. A little quaint song, much sung then, but forgotten now, or lost in the stream of new ones which flow in countless num-



"Song after song I played, and Violet sang."—p. 41.

bers on the current of popular applause for a time, lay first.

“Golden years ago, in a mill beside the sea,
There lived a little maiden, who plighted her
faith to me.”

The accompaniment keeps up the monotonous sound of the mill, and there is a strangely fascinating refrain of

“Do not forget me,”

which lingers in the ear long after, when, as the song tells, the little maiden had passed away, and left only a memory behind with her pathetic appeal of

“Do not forget me.”

“Did you ever sing that song before, Violet?” I asked, when we drew near the fire again, and she, sitting on a low chair by my side, put her dear little hand in mine.

“No,” she said, “never. The other songs I know from hearing them so very

very often ; Elsie practises them, and the choristers."

" Yes, I understand ; but how is it you have not sung more ? "

" I *do* sing," she said, " to myself, and to those who care for me."

" You must sing to me very often."

She looked up in my face. " I could not bear to make Elsie think I wanted to take her place. She is a hundred times cleverer than I am, and so handsome, she is sure to get on in public. I *never* should. I could sing for a *reason*, but not for money."

" Is not that a reason ? "

" I would rather sing for *love*," was the quick reply.

" Well," I said, " I shall call you my little pupil, and you will sing to me often for love, I hope ; and shall we learn a little French and German together ? "

Her face brightened.

"Oh, thank you, I *shall* like that; for, of course, I have so much to do at home. I have not been to school since I was twelve; and mother is so much of an invalid, and Elsie wants so many things—for she goes to Bristol or Bath when there is a good concert—and it all costs money, and we have so little. But Elsie is so clever, it *would* be a pity if she could not have every advantage. She has written a really good little piece called "The Waterfall," and Mr. Burton is going to get it out. Then she has extraordinary compass of voice; did you not notice it?"

"Yes," I replied, "I did; but——"

"I know what you mean," Violet said; "it *is* a pity, but I think she will get over it. They say people *do* sometimes. I must go home now, please."

I wrapped a shawl round my head, and went out with her to the door of my

garden, opening into the road by the upper gate of the Clerk's Close.

The Easter moon was high in the heavens, and innumerable stars looked down from the blue sky. As Violet turned her face up to me for a kiss, I wondered how any one could fail to see how pretty she was ; and so I bade her good night.





Chapter III

Failure.

I OFTEN went to the Gainors' cottage during the next few days, and devised a plan for Mark to attend the concert.

I had an invalid chair, carried by poles, and this, I promised Mark, should convey him to the Town Hall. Violet's delight was unbounded; and, having got the doctor's leave, she and I made all our arrangements, and had dressed Mark, by three o'clock on Monday afternoon, for the first time since his accident, in his Sunday suit and white collar.

Mrs. Gainor looked on with content; and Susie was so vociferous that I was

glad when Anne Hicks came and carried off that young person, to "bide," as she called it, with her own children; while Mark, all ready for his expedition, was left to get a little nap. Four of the choristers were to call for him at half-past six, and were to convey him to the corner, under the orchestra, where he could be comfortable, and hear without being seen. Violet asked me to come in with her for a few minutes to see Elsie's dress, which was lying ready for her. It was a blue, gauzy material, with bunches of roses on it, and a wreath of roses for her head. I thought there were rather too many bows, and that the dress was altogether too fine; but Violet assured me Elsie looked lovely in it, as the colour suited her hair so well.

"Mother is going to the concert. I have trimmed up her old black silk, and she had got a nice cap. I hope it won't

quite knock her up ; but the pleasure of seeing Elsie will reward her."

"And you, Violet ; what are you going to wear ?"

"Oh, I only sing in the choruses, and I shall not be seen much, if at all. I have got an old white muslin of Elsie's, which does quite well, and I shall put some violets and primroses under the band which holds my hair back. I have no gloves, but that does not matter."

However, I was determined Violet should have gloves ; and I went to a shop in the market-place to buy a pair for her, of primrose colour, to match the flowers, and I added a little lace for the neck of the muslin, and a new fillet of pale violet ribbon for her hair. The bills about the concert were in the shop windows, and the names of the performers. "Miss Elsinora Scott" was printed in large type. Two ladies and a gentleman,

strangers in Minsterleigh, were reading the bill in the window of one shop as I passed.

"That girl is the daughter of the late organist here. She is, I hear, wonderfully pretty, but sings out of tune sometimes. It is all Minsterleigh talent it seems at the concert. Well, I hope they will get some money for the church."

As I was turning away from the window with the little parcel in my hand, I saw Elsie was standing by me, and had also heard the remarks of the stranger. Her face was flushed with deep crimson, and her beautiful eyes were full of tears.

"There," she said to me, "you hear that. I have some jealous enemies, who say these horrid things of me. Is it not shameful? I will show them they are mistaken to-night."

"My dear," I said, "the breath of

popular applause is, at best, very uncertain, but those who sing, or do anything else, for love are not affected by it."

"And you think, Miss Carmichael, I don't love music? I do; and that is why I can't bear to hear every one trying to crush me. Mamma says it is nothing but jealousy."

"Oh! foolish mother," I thought, but I said no more. I was really very sorry for Elsie. Before honour is humility, I said to myself, and "Thou shalt bring down the high looks of the proud."

We met Violet half-way up the Clerk's Close, running to fetch something which had been forgotten from the grocer's.

"Is my dress ready, Violet?" Elsie asked, "I hope you altered the bow on the right side."

"Oh yes, it is quite ready; do go in and rest, dear," Violet said.

I put my parcel into Violet's hand, and

left the two sisters standing together, then I turned, and hastened home.

My seat at the concert was one of two rows, which were raised on either side of the room. I preferred this, as I was near Mark Gainor, who was just below me, on his couch, and I could watch every expression of his face. I was also near the door under the orchestra leading into the little room where the performers met between the parts. The wife and daughter of one of the canons went with me to the concert, and several neighbours and friends were near us.

There was the usual hum of conversation, and the usual amount of inspection of the people who came into the room, which is the same in a grand London audience as in a little provincial assembly like ours. At last the orchestra was placed, the chorus was seated — altos, basses, *tenors*, *trebles*. Mr. Burton came in last,

followed by the leading singers—Elsie Scott prominent amongst them, standing between two very plain girls, who had good strong voices, but not much refinement of execution. I looked anxiously for my little Violet, and she nodded and smiled down at me from her obscure corner amongst the trebles. Mark Gainor could see her also, for I saw his face kindling with smiles as he raised himself on his elbow to look at Violet's corner of the orchestra.

It was a very creditable performance, and all went well. Elsie sang with great clearness, and, flushed with excitement, she got through "Rejoice greatly" without a perceptible fault. I say perceptible, to ears like mine. Mrs. Scott was seated in the middle of the room, and at the conclusion of the first part her face also, like her daughter's, was lighted with triumph. Even Miss Price, who was near

me, whispered to her neighbour, "Yes, very good ; a great success, and I never saw her look so handsome."

A selection from Mendelssohn's Midsummer Night's Dream came next, and then Elsie's great secular solo,

"When sparrows build and the leaves break forth,
My old sorrow wakes and cries."

I can see Elsie Scott as she stood before me now, in all her beauty. Just as I should have liked a little less finery on her dress, I should have liked a little less exultation on her face. This song is a difficult one, from sudden changes. It was shaky from the first, and in vain Mr. Burton sounded the leading notes. Whether Elsie's voice was strained by its former efforts, I know not ; but certain it is, that line, "Perhaps I shall see him and know him again," was out of tune, and she came down on the prolonged lower note with what was such palpable discord, that



THE CONCERT.

I saw Mark put his hand up as if in appeal, and an irascible old gentleman near me said, "Tut-tut." I dared not look at Mrs. Scott; but I gave a glance at Violet. I shall never forget her face—troubled, anxious, distressed in its expression.

And did Elsie know at last that she was "flat"? The last note had scarcely died away when the cold silence, just broken by a faint applause, seemed to strike her. She turned quickly round, and snatched up the music from the piano. As she did so, the long floating sleeve of the blue tarlatan was caught in one of the candles on the piano, and Elsie Scott was in flames. I saw Mrs. Scott rise with a wild cry from her seat. I saw, as in a dream, little Violet's white stricken face, and then there was a short commotion on the platform. Mrs. Scott made her way to the little door beneath and vanished, and Mr.

Burton came quickly to the front. "I am thankful to say," he began, "that Miss Scott is not seriously hurt—a mere scorch of the arm. We can go on with our programme, as Mr. Long, the doctor, assures me that a little quiet will soon restore Miss Scott."

So the concert went on. Then there was a slight pause when Elsie's next solo came next in order. Mr. Burton looked quickly up to the place where Violet sat; for, quiet and self-possessed, she had returned to it when the panic about her sister had subsided. Mr. Burton held up the music, and, to my surprise, Violet came down to the front of the orchestra. Mr. Burton went and whispered something; she smiled in return; and, coming forward, we saw she was going to take her sister's song. It was "Will he come?"

Low and gentle at first, her voice soon swelled forth, like a bird's at dawn. She

was rapturously applauded, and an encore, the first of the evening, was not to be refused. Mr. Burton again spoke to her, and, in her sweet, childish, simple way, she looked at me and nodded, and then sang, with infinite pathos, "Maid of the Mill."

It was a great trial ; all this praise and applause which followed, and this sudden revelation to the people of Minsterleigh that they had a real singer amongst them ; how would she bear it ? I was anxious and curious to know. I took the freedom of old times, and went to the room under the orchestra. As I passed I felt my dress pulled. I looked down, and saw Mark.

"There ! ma'am ; am I not right ? can she not sing ?" the boy asked ; "but even I did not know she could sing like that."

I found Violet putting on her cloak

and hat, and hurrying to rejoin her mother and sister, who were just leaving the hall.

"She is not much hurt," Violet said; "but she is shaken and frightened, and she is crying so dreadfully. Mr. Ford has got a fly for them."

"You sang well, Violet," I said, kissing her dear little face. .

"Oh! I am glad you think so," was Violet's answer. "I was so afraid it would spoil the concert if nobody sang another solo; for they always please people the best; good night." And she was gone.

I had some talk with Mr. Burton when the performers cleared off.

"It was an exciting scene," he said, "but I caught her in time, and I don't think she is really hurt; but, poor child, I believe she has learned her lesson at last. A hard one, no doubt. However,

she will do something in music, though she will never sing."

"And now, I must see about Gainor. Poor boy! what a treat you have given him, and well he deserved it. He has been so patient, and is always such a well-behaved boy. His voice is a great loss to the choir."

I walked home under the stars, thinking much of the two sisters who had taken such a prominent part in that evening. Perhaps it was the beginning of better things to Elsie, for we know that the gate of honour is humility. Time would prove.





Chapter V

A Hard Lesson.

I SAW Elsie the next day, alone in her room. Her nerves were much shaken, as is always the case after a burn, however slight, and she was evidently unwilling to talk much. She was like a child angry with the lesson given her to learn, and sullenly determined to do so as slowly as possible, and to avoid it altogether if she could.

Mr. Ford said the burn was little more than a scorch, and the skin had only been rubbed in one place; but he said the depression and the nervousness were very common, as even the sight of one-

self in flames always gives a shock to the nervous system.

I think the month that followed the concert was the hardest trial that Violet could know. Her spirit, brave as it was, was sorely tried. Nothing would rouse Elsie to speak to her sister of what was past. She never touched the piano, nor made any inquiry about the result of the concert, nor did she make any remark about Violet's songs.

Of course they had made an impression, a deep impression, on our little society, and the child could not fail to know it; but she was far from being puffed up. The love that was in her was her spring, and kept her from sinking under the gloom which now reigned in the little house in the Clerk's Close.

"I don't think she can help it," Violet said to me one day when we had been reading together, as we now frequently

did. "I am sure she cannot help it; but if she only knew how sorry I feel for her. I took Mark up to see her to-day on his crutches, thinking it might interest her; but she would scarcely speak to him, and only asked him if his leg was getting all right. Mamma, too, is so unhappy; what can I do to make them happy again?"

"It is very hard for you," I said involuntarily.

"Oh! it is not that," she replied quickly. "Only, when I love Elsie so much, and think her so beautiful and clever, it makes me so sad to think it is my voice which has given her so much pain."

"The pain of sinful jealousy," I said hastily. "It is right she should be punished."

"Oh, no! please do not say so," Violet pleaded. "It will all come right, I am sure—for——," the colour came into the

sweet child-face, which was partly turned from me—"for you know I pray always to God to make it right, and to show Elsie the way to use the gifts He has given her."

Another secret of my little Violet's serenity, this "praying always."

How many of us, in our perplexities and troubles about our dear ones, forget to "pray always"? Do not we miss many blessings for them and for ourselves by this means?

As Elsie recovered from the shock of the burn, and resumed her usual habits, she seemed strangely unable to acknowledge that her ear or voice was incorrect. She did not soften in her manner to her sister, and it often grieved me to notice how irritable and harsh she was to Violet. But I could say nothing to change her. I felt time alone would teach Elsie her lesson; and meanwhile I tried to let

both girls look on me as their friend, and endeavoured to win their confidence.

With Violet this was easy, and I am always glad to look back on this time, and feel that I was a comfort to her. Elsie lived, like many of us, under a crust of self-deception, and this crust was so hard that scarcely a ray of her better self could shine through it. She had the fixed idea that every one was prejudiced against her; that Mr. Burton had reasons of his own for saying she sung false notes; that every one, in short, had a spite at her.

"Suppose I did sing a false note at that dreadful concert," Elsie said to me one day, "hundreds of people do the same, and nothing is thought of it."

"My dear child," I said kindly, "you are mistaken. It is torture to a really musical ear to hear a false note sung, or a discord repeating in a band.

"Well, Miss Carmichael, I am quite

certain singing may have qualities of its own which will cover a fault here and there. If there is passion and feeling in singing, these are the things which appeal to people who have souls. Only those Minsterleigh people are so narrow-minded, and know nothing about music. Poor papa thought so, I know, and he had a weary life with them. I hate and detest Minsterleigh, and I must get away from it. It is like a prison to me, and I don't intend to go back to Miss Price to drudge for her, while she is all the time not a bit grateful, but full of spite. I am miserable when I think of it."

"While you talk in this strain, Elsie," I said, "I fear there is little hope of your feeling happy. My dear, you manufacture your own troubles, just as Violet——"

"You are just like Mr. Burton, I see, setting up Violet——" Elsie interrupted.

"What were you going to say?"

Violet manufactures her own happiness, Elsie. She has found the secret of it in living out of herself for others."

We were seated in my own pleasant room, where I was covering some books for the reading library. Elsie was leaning back in a rocking chair, and swaying herself to and fro with a gentle continuous movement. I could not help thinking that her sister would not have watched me at my work in that dreamy fashion, but would have helped me.

Presently Elsie said—"Nobody cared the other evening at The Deanery when Lady Williams skipped several notes in 'Vaga Luna,' an easy little song which anybody ought to get through. Every one said, 'Charming,' and 'Thank you so much,' while after all it was badly sung. I mean it was imperfectly sung. Then I have a better instance still. Don't you remember that letter of Mendelssohn's from Rome in the

book you lent me when I was ill. He says heaps of false notes were sung in the Pope's Chapel at Easter by choristers, that all the world used to travel no end of distances to hear. Now, is it fair that I should be put down and told I can't sing for a slip now and then, when such slips are thought trifles when others make them?" Elsie said this with so much simplicity, and with such an air of perfect conviction, that for a moment I was puzzled how to reply.

"Well," I said, after a minute's consideration, "there are circumstances under which faults are passed over. Lady Williams is loved by every one in the neighbourhood, and her parties are always the pleasantest that can be imagined. She puts every one at their ease, and tries to suit all tastes. Then you must remember how hard she works *at the schools and the clubs*, and how full

her life is of engagements, so that she can have but little time for practising her singing. Every one knows this, and therefore no one dreams of criticising her when she sings. But, my dear Elsie, it is different with you; you intend to make music your profession and practise——”

“I don’t practise now,” she said sharply. “I have not opened my lips for weeks.”

“Well, you have practised I don’t know how many hours a-day; therefore people expect you to have overcome difficulties; and you must not be offended—people will not pay, as a rule, to hear uncertain singing. When I was a girl, and learning music—for which I had always great love, but no great skill—my father said to me when I played the wrong note in a sonata four times following, ‘Old Horace says, Nina, “One only laughs at a player who always goes wrong on the same note.”’

I never forgot this warning, and no one who wishes to excel in anything must forget it either. Aim at perfection or a high standard of excellence, even if you can never hope to attain it. As to Mendelssohn's letter from Rome, it is, I daresay, true enough that some of those choristers were grossly out of tune; but at the same time there was a tenderness and pathos in the singing which the world could not match anywhere else. Anyhow, English musicians must not shelter themselves under Italian carelessness, until our voices are melted by that sun of theirs, which suits them as ours does the thrush and nightingale, and frees them from the toil of learning and practice which is so hard on people like you or me. All through those Italian letters of Mendelssohn, you will find he had a contempt for the want of skilful execution in that country. He says their

orchestras thought the Creation far too difficult to be performed ; and, you know, we are bold enough to try it even in poor, behindhand, unappreciative Minsterleigh."

"Don't laugh at me, Miss Carmichael, I can't help feeling angry, and I shall try to go away from this place ; and then I do believe I should succeed. I may never be able to sing again. I am very weak after that dreadful burn, for——"

Elsie's voice trembled. I did feel sorry for her ; for nothing hurts one more than the falls of pride.

"If I were once really convinced," she added, after a few minutes, "that I could not sing perfectly in tune, I would give up ; but while only Minsterleigh says so, I *can't* give up ; why should I ? I must rouse myself soon to do something about it, for we are so poor, and mother is so dreadfully disappointed about me. Violet, you see, can do so many other things,

but I am only fit for music. I can't work and stitch all day, and I can't be what is called a 'useful person.'"

I looked at my pile of books, and thought there was no denying this last assertion, so I was silent.



Chapter VI

The Crucial Test.

MARK GAINOR was still very weak and ailing, and Violet said she considered him now *my* patient as well as hers, and that I was physician in chief.

The early summer passed, and August, hot and sultry, made me anxious to get Mark into the fresh air, from his mother's close cottage. I borrowed an old wheel chair from the Dean's wife, and my ancient gardener and factotum, Notman, used to drag Mark about in it for an hour in the cool of the evening.

Sometimes he would come to my house to meet Violet, and once or twice she sang to him.

The boy's own voice was gone, never, Mr. Long said, to return ; and the way he met this trouble was indeed a lesson to us all.

Mark's was not a common character, and he had a wonderfully refined mind. Music had been his real life ; and he had sung, not for applause or praise, but from the true love of the art, and because he could not help it. Mr. Burton gave him copying to do ; and, as he gained strength, he allowed him to be carried up to the organ loft sometimes to watch him playing.

But this was a treat that could not often be given him, and the "drags" in the wheel chair were of more frequent occurrence. Violet accompanied us sometimes, and it was delightful to watch Mark's joy as he saw the river again, and the clump of pollards by the great pool where the trout lay like dark lines in the

crystal waters, and the cricket field where the choristers played their matches, and where he had once been the best bat in the club.

But old Notman's strength was not very great, and the level ground near the minster was the most frequent "drag." "Drag" was Violet's name for these expeditions, and was very appropriate. So we used to linger about the Close, watching the men at the restoration works, and Mark used to look through my double opera glass at the gargoyles and corbals as one by one they were finished off.

There was something amusing in Mark's indignation as figure after figure came out white and new from under the workman's scraping tools. One afternoon we were taking a general inspection of the finished figures, and Mark exclaimed—

"I declare Anselm and Robert of Anjou look as if they had got a new coat a-piece,

and I do believe they've done for the bit of wall flower which came out so nicely through Thomas Somebody's coat pocket. Take the glass, ma'am, and look ; I call it a shame."

I ought to say that we had given names to the various figures without too much historic accuracy, and when I raised the glass to look at Thomas Aquinas, I heard some one near me laughing.

"It's too true, the wall flower is gone from Thomas Somebody's coat. Fancy a little fellow like you knowing about it."

The speaker was our new minor canon, Mr. Everett, who had taken a good deal of notice of Mark, and in whose friendship for him I rejoiced.

A shower of rain came on while Mr. Everett was speaking, and we turned into the cloister gates, where Mark's chair had, by the Dean's kindness, permission to enter. Elsie, who had been to Mr. Bur-

ton's, joined us, and Mr. Everett looked inquiringly at her.

"Miss Scott," I said, introducing her.

"I have heard of you," he said. "Mr. Burton tells me you have a voice which, when you are older, will be heard of beyond Minsterleigh; but he really thinks you ought not to use it much as yet."

Elsie's beautiful face flushed as she said—"I have sung for a long time both in public and private. Mr. Burton must have been speaking of my sister."

Violet was talking to Mark about a slab in the cloister pavement, and did not raise her head nor show that it was of herself Mr. Burton had spoken. My modest Violet did not forget her real character.

"Oh," said Mr. Everett, "I hope I shall hear you sing very soon. It seems," he added, turning to me, "I shall never come to an end of the wonders of Minsterleigh. It will take me a year to find

them all out. What is it you are talking about now, Gainor?"

"Only about a slab in the pavement, sir. We—Miss Violet and I—can't make out the name. Go on, please, Mr. Notman, and I will show you, sir, the picture of Walter Tyrell galloping like mad from the New Forest after he had shot the King. Here it is in that old coloured window, Look, sir, do you see the quiver on Walter's back, it is twice as big as he is."

Elsie, who walked a little apart, tried not to look as if she were interested, and her lips were closely pressed together in their proud and scornful curve. Mr. Everett had a great deal to say, not only about Walter Tyrell, but about the curious painted windows along the side of the cloister, which was called the lavatory.

Here were the deep troughs with the holes in them where the water ran out, when the plug was lifted; and on one

side was a beautiful carved recess, where Mr. Everett said he had no doubt the monks kept their towels! The pictures in the windows all along the lavatory were illustrative of the mention of water in the Bible. The miraculous draught of fishes; the turning the water into wine; the storm at sea, when the Lord rebuked the winds and the waves; St. Peter walking on the water. All these designs were quaint and original, and Mr. Everett was evidently much interested in watching Mark's eager face as he pointed them out.

Then there was the scriptorium, where, each in his little stone recess, the monks made copies of the Word of God; and when we had passed the scriptorium, we came to the door of the chapter house, which opened into the cloister.

"There's a most wonderful echo here, sir," said Mark. "Miss Violet and I have heard it many a time. I can't sing now,

but she can, and you don't know how beautiful it is. Do try, sir. You sing the four notes of a chord, and Miss Violet the four of another which answers to it. The echo is so good, that it carries on all four at once for ever so long, and it sounds as if there never was any such harmony as yourself taking all the parts at once. We tried—that is, Buckwell, the head boy, and I—'Lift thine eyes,' the quartett from the *Elijah*. He took one chord and I another, till we had gone half through. Oh! I wish I could sing it with Miss Violet now. Do, sir, try."

The boy's face flushed with excitement, and he looked round for Violet. She had gone back to the other end of the cloister on purpose, I knew. For Elsie stood tall and stately, with her head thrown back, and with a look on her face, as much as to say, "Why not ask *me* to sing the chord?"

Mr. Everett had an excellent ear, and a good quality of voice, and he said—"I will try; but one had need be very true to make it perfect harmony."

Mr. Everett gave out Do, Mi, Sol, Do. The effect was startling. Even in the best quartett singers there is a difference of quality distinguishing voice from voice. Here there was, of course, none; but the notes were in their absolute oneness of quality like those of a musical instrument; while, at the same time, the point and expression were such as only the "human voice divine" could produce.

I beckoned Violet back, and Mr. Everett said to Elsie—"Miss Scott, let us hear you try."

But Elsie was apparently unconscious of the request.

"Come, Violet," I said, "let Mr. Everett hear you try."

Mr. Everett went over his chord again,

and then, gently and sweetly, Violet replied with a chord one degree lower. The effect was that of the first blackbird's note after a summer shower, only heightened by that harmony which is God's peculiar gift to man.

Elsie listened, and, in spite of herself, her whole musical nature stirred within her; forgetful for the moment of self; forgetful of small jealousies and ignoble aims; forgetful of all the manifold miseries which these had brought upon her, Elsie tried the bold flight of the dominant above!





Chapter VII

A Downfall.

THE first three notes went all well, but I really trembled when I remembered that the top note must necessarily be the G; that upper G which had been so fatal on the night of the concert. It came at last; and we all listened for the effect, which ought to have been a perfect pæan of victory. Alas! to what can I compare what really followed in Elsie's G? To a faded and crumpled flower crowning a choice nosegay of perfect blossoms? Worse than that—worse by far; for there is nothing within us which so imperiously calls for a flower in any particular place,

as the musical ear does for its just rights as to "dominants."

It was more like the first tinge of yellow on the snowy purity of the lily, suggesting I know not what possibilities of decay and corruption! Poor Mark could not control himself, his hands were raised to his ears to shut out the obtrusive discord, while Mr. Everett gave a shrug of his shoulders, and a scarcely audible *whish* of pain, as if touched in a sore place. Violet turned away, tears were in her eyes, and yet she was afraid to show the sympathy she felt for her sister. And Elsie herself! she stood pale and motionless as one of the stone figures above the chapter-house door. Not one word did she utter, till Mr. Everett said to me—"The rain is over. I must say good-bye." And then, with a courteous bow, he left us.

Elsie turned round then, and said

in a low voice—"What an immense time we have been here, and how cold it is."

A scarcely perceptible shudder seemed to sweep over her as we left the cloisters together. Had she learned her lesson? I looked earnestly at her as we parted, and the expression of her face struck me. Self-control and humility, self-mastery and tenderness seemed to be preparing a home for themselves within her. But it was in utter silence that she and I and Violet parted at my garden gate, and Notman dragged Mark away to his own home.

It was a few days later that Mr. Burton came to see me with Mr. Everett. Mr. Burton said that they both thought such a voice as Violet's ought to have cultivation, that a lady of great wealth in the neighbourhood was most anxious to do something to help the Scotts for

their father's sake, and that he was sure if she heard Violet sing she would be answerable for her musical education, and thus her success in life would be ensured.

"I am going to propose," Mr. Everett said, "that you and I should drive out to Leydon, and take Violet and Mr. Burton with us. Mrs. Vere is a relation of mine, and I know if she sees the child she will be interested, and if she hears her sing, her heart will be won. Did you ever hear anything lovelier than the echo of her voice in the cloister, nor anything more frightful than the false note of the other sister?"

"And the odd thing is, she seems altogether unconscious of her want of precision," Mr. Burton said.

"Not now, not now, Mr. Burton," I exclaimed, "Elsie's face told me she heard and knew at last."

Mr. Burton smiled.

"I will almost undertake to say that Elsie would tell you there is something wrong with the echo when she sung the notes of the chord! You know, Miss Carmichael, Minsterleigh has no ear and no taste. We are all a set of spiteful ignoramuses about music!"

Mr. Everett laughed.

"Be patient," I said, "Elsie will acknowledge her weakness at last. Now let us think about Violet. I shall be most happy to go with her to Mrs. Vere's any day next week. We must ask her first about it, she is so like her name," I said. "Mr. Burton and I know how she dislikes to put herself forward, especially if it is to hurt her sister."

"That may be carried too far," Mr. Burton said. "I, for one, feel that a musical gift like that child's must not be suffered to lie uncultivated."

“Well, I will speak to her about it this evening. She comes to read German with me twice a-week. It is a help to her, and such a pleasure to me.”

Mr. Everett then went on to discuss Mark Gainor. His mother's illness continued, and the boy had no chance of getting strong shut up in that cottage with the little ones clamouring about. “The doctor says that he fears the broken leg is not *all* the mischief; he thinks the boy's spine has got a jar, and that he will probably never grow much more, but be a good deal crippled for the rest of his life. I have taken such a fancy to the boy,” Mr. Everett said, “that I intend to take him to live with me, and coach him up in his lessons, while Mr. Burton is to be so good as to look after his music.”

“Oh!” I exclaimed, “how glad I am you came to Minsterleigh. The right

people do come to the right place sometimes ! ”

From that day Mr. Everett and I were good friends, and our interest in the children was a strong link between us.

* * * *

It was as I expected. Violet was unaffectedly unwilling to push herself forward, though the idea of going out with me into the country and seeing beautiful flowers, and hearing Mrs. Vere play, was delightful to her.

“ Could Elsie come too ? ” Violet asked, “ she seems so dull and so sad. Not cross, as she used to be, but so sad ; she sits doing nothing,” Violet said. “ She won’t practise, or touch the piano ; and yesterday, when I began to play a little, she went out of the room crying. Then mother is so vexed, and now Elsie has given up teaching at Miss Price’s, it is harder than ever to get on.”

Poor Violet was nearly breaking down as she told me this ; but I brightened her up with the story of Mark Gainor, and of Mr. Everett's kind intention for him.

"Oh ! it would all be beautiful," Violet said, "if only Elsie would cheer up. Since that day in the cloister she has been like this, and hardly spoken."

"Let us be patient, and let us be hopeful, Violet. *I* am hopeful ; for I think some change is working for good in your sister's heart."

The day we went to Leydon was one of those golden autumn days when everything is in fullest beauty. It was a holiday for Mr. Burton, who worked incessantly at his profession, and it was a treat indeed to Violet. The child's delight in everything was so charming. Her face was a picture of intense enjoyment. I think it was her utter unselfishness and freedom from self-consciousness that made

her so easy in her manners, and added a charm to her which could scarcely be put into words. Leydon Hall was a very large and spacious house, filled with pictures and beautiful sculpture, and all that taste and refinement could do was done in the arrangement of the rooms. Mrs. Vere was a stately lady, somewhat past middle age; she received us in her morning room, where a splendid grand piano of Broadwood's stood across a circular window filled with flowers.

"Is this the little songstress?" Mrs. Vere said. "You have a wonderful knack," she continued, turning to Mr. Everett, "of finding musicians wherever you go. I remember your father, my dear," Mrs. Vere went on to Violet. "He was an excellent man, and I am glad his mantle should have descended on his children. Now we will go in to luncheon, and then you shall see the place; and Miss Car-

michael will want to carry home a basket of flowers, I am sure ! After we have got through this, and we know each other better, you shall sing to me. But," she added aside to me, "is she not too young to sing ?"

Mr. Burton here interfered, and talked learnedly of the mysteries of counter-point and the science of music, which all who follow music as a profession must learn.

"I ought to say she has a sister—an elder sister—who will do something in music, though not as a singer."

"Is she the Miss Elsinora Scott whose name was in the concert bill you sent me when I was abroad in May ?"

"Yes ; but," and Mr. Burton hesitated, "though with a good quality of voice and a wide compass, there is unhappily some defect that makes the upper notes uncertain. Mr. Everett can tell you about it,

for he heard her try the chords by the chapter-house door last week."

"The chords by the chapter-house door ; what fancy is this, Henry ?"

"No fancy, but a very stern reality. There is a marvellous echo there, and the notes of a chord sung in succession make an extraordinary harmony—if sung false, an extraordinary discord."

"Really ; well, I shall come in to luncheon with you soon, and then you must introduce me to the extraordinary harmony—not to the extraordinary discord, please !"



Chapter VIII

Songs.

VIOLET showed no sign of nervousness when at last Mr. Burton seated himself at the piano, and she stood up to sing.

Mrs. Vere settled herself into an attitude of attention, preparing to criticise. Mr. Everett leaned back in his chair watching his cousin's face, while an amused expression hovered over his own.

As for me, I had no eyes for anything but that little slight figure standing by Mr. Burton's side. Violet's face was turned from me, and I could only catch the outline of her pretty profile and slender throat. As the spirit of the music

came over her, the child sang as the birds sing to the sun rising. Indeed, I always thought of "Thanksgiving" when I listened to her pouring out her young soul, singing to the Lord with the voice of melody.

Song followed song. Violet showed no sign of weariness, and Mrs. Vere seemed to forget everything in the way of criticism; tears were in her eyes, and were ready to fall. As the last song was dying away, she rose, and, going up to Violet, said—"My dear, I should like you to live with me. It is a great gift, and you wear it well." Then Mrs. Vere bent down and kissed that sweet face I loved so well, and Mr. Burton and Mr. Everett were satisfied.

Laden with fruit and flowers, we drove home in the soft autumn twilight. We did not talk much, but we were very happy.

Arrangements were to be made for Violet to go to London to see a great professor there, to whom Mrs. Vere was to write, and, if possible, Mr. Burton was to accompany her with me.

When the carriage stopped at my door, Violet said to me—"Would you mind coming home with me to tell mother all about it? There is only one thing to spoil my pleasure, and that is poor Elsie. I can tell them better about it all when you are with me, Miss Carmichael."

So we made up a lovely bunch of flowers for Elsie, and I filled a basket of peaches and nectarines for Mrs. Scott, and so we walked together to the Clerk's Close.

It was getting quite dark, and when we reached the Scotts' house there were no candles lighted as in the other houses; we passed on our way, but all looked dark and gloomy.

Violet went in first and opened the sitting-room door. It was empty. "No one is here," Violet said, "I suppose mother is gone out with Elsie. Where can Elsie be?"

At this moment, a high-pitched, querulous voice I knew well called from the top of the narrow stairs—"Is that you, Violet, come in from your day's pleasure, leaving your poor sister all alone?"

"Yes, mother, I am here with Miss Carmichael."

Then we heard a murmur of indistinct words, and a match struck. And Mrs. Scott came down with a candle in her hand. She was very untidy, poor woman; her cap all awry, and her chain and bracelets clinking.

"Elsie is lying down with a bad headache, Miss Carmichael. I think she has dropped asleep now. Poor girl, what

she has suffered from the unkindness of people, like her father before her! Well now, Violet, you may take your turn and look after your sister. Yes, I see, lovely flowers, and what peaches! But when one has hard work to earn one's daily bread they look like a mockery. I wish Mrs. Vere had sent something more substantial; but rich people are always as selfish as they can be."

Mrs. Scott went on in an ever-continuous strain of grumble, to which Violet made no rejoinder.

She had been upstairs to take off her hat, and was soon in the little kitchen lighting the fire and filling the kettle.

"A cup of tea is sure to do Elsie good," she said, as she flitted in and out. "She always likes a cup of tea when her head aches."

"Well, don't wake her now. I think she was quite overcome with your grand

visit. Of course it is Elsie who ought to have gone to Mrs. Vere's, and if it had not been for Mr. Burton's spite, she would have been the one."

To reason with weak, shallow-minded people like Mrs. Scott is waste of breath. I had found this out, and I therefore took no notice of her reflections on Mr. Burton, nor her selfish blindness about Elsie's singing.

But I took the opportunity of telling Mrs. Scott of her child's prospects, and that both Mr. Everett, our new minor canon, and Mr. Burton were of opinion that she would distinguish herself in her profession, and by Mrs. Vere's kindness she would now have the very best training that could be procured.

Two days passed without my hearing of Violet, and on the morning of the third I met Mr. Burton as I was coming out of the cathedral.

"This is a sad thing in the close," he said, "with the poor Scotts."

"What is it?" I asked. "I know nothing."

"Elsie has sickened with scarlet fever, and you may suppose who has the weight of everything on her shoulders."

"Poor little Violet," I exclaimed. "What is to be done?"

"Mr. Long is going to telegraph to the fever hospital for a proper nurse. Violet is sure to sicken next, and it is a complaint in which none of us can be of help. Of course the infection raises a barrier at once."

"Not to me," I exclaimed. "I had it badly five years ago, and I am too old to catch it again. I shall go and speak to Mr. Long at once."

Mr. Long was, like all doctors, very much concerned at the idea of spreading *infection* needlessly. He thought I had

far better keep away and trust to what help he could call in to nurse Elsie.

"Then I will take Violet to my own house," I said. "Mr. Long, I am so greatly attached to that child, her character is so beautifully unselfish, I *must* help her. You go into infection, why should not I? I will take every precaution. I will wash with carbolic acid soap. I will, do everything you tell me, but I must help Violet."

I gained my point, and took up my abode in the little house in the Clerk's Close. The fever ran its course; for some days Elsie was in great danger, and then a turn came for the better, and Mr. Long said she would live. She was very weak, and but the ghost of the former Elsie lay before us.

Her feverish wanderings had all been about music and singing, and often she would start up and say she heard Violet

singing, and how the people applauded her.

Now she was recovering, she did not speak of music, nor refer to the past. Not till one evening, when, lying very still, I thought she was asleep, but presently I heard her voice calling me by name—"Miss Carmichael, where is Violet?"

"She is with your mother, my dear, in the parlour."

"Is she ill?"

"No; mercifully she has been preserved from infection, and we may thank God that no one has caught the fever as yet."

"How long have I been ill?"

"Nearly a month, my dear."

"Have you nursed me all the time?"

"Nearly all; we had a nurse from Bristol at first, but now you are getting better there is no need for this."

"What made you come and nurse me?"

“Love, dear Elsie, love for Violet, and desire to spare her. I knew if I had not come she would have worn herself out, and very likely caught the fever and perhaps died.”

Tears rolled down the thin face.

“He has brought down the high looks of the proud!” she murmured. “I am not proud now. That day in the cloister showed me that I shall never sing; that I never *can* sing, and I shall never try again. Violet shall sing, and I will play for her. I will be, oh! so kind to her now, if she will only love me a little!”

Yes, the lesson was learned at last. Through disappointment and vexation, through pain and weariness, through sorrow and disappointment, Elsie had passed, by God’s grace, from the death of selfish pride and vain glory, to the life of love and humility.

And now before I leave these two sisters, whose young lives have been so closely bound up in mine, I must tell you of one of the happiest evenings I ever remember to have passed. It was four years later, and again a concert was to take place in the Shire Hall at Minsterleigh. The concert was for the funds of a Cottage hospital, in which we were all much interested. The great event of the evening to me, and to many others also, was a song to be sung by Violet Scott, the music written by her sister, Elsinora Scott. The words were those of Lowell, the American poet. It was called—

THE FEET OF THE ANGELS.

“They live not in the Past alone,
But thread to-day the unheeding street,
And stairs to sin and sorrow known
Sing to the welcome of their feet.
The den they enter glows a shrine,
The grimy sash an oriel burns ;

Their cup of water warms like wine,
Their speech is filled from heavenly urns.

“Around their brows to me appears
An aureole traced in tenderest light,
The rainbow gleam of smiles through tears
In dying eyes by them made bright;
Of souls who shivered on the edge
Of the chill stream repassed no more
And in their mercy felt the pledge
And sweetness of the heavenly shore.”

When the sisters came forward to receive the rapturous “encore” of the audience, I could but contrast the present with the past. Elsie’s tall, graceful figure was now set off by a plain, very plain dress of black velvet, made high to the throat, with no “tinkling ornaments” or tawdry finery. Little Violet was in white, with the flowers whose name she bore fastened in her hair and at her throat. Ever gentle and modest, she won all hearts.

I listened with pride and thankfulness

to the remarks made by some strangers who were guests in a house in the neighbourhood, and did not know me, or that the person sitting next me was the mother of the two sisters.

“That is a very beautiful song,” one gentleman said, “and how difficult it must have been to compose the music for the orchestra. Really the two girls are equally gifted, one to compose such music, and the other to sing it. Then there is that lame boy who plays the piano, his is a striking face. Did you notice how he seemed to follow every note that girl sang?”

“Hush! she is going to sing again. How sweet and pretty she is,—a mere child. And with what pride the elder sister looks at her! She is extremely handsome, but they do not look like sisters.”

Mark Gainor struck the full chords on

the piano, and then there was a hush in the conversation.

Violet's eyes sought mine, and a smile broke over her face as she began the old song of "Golden years ago," with the same pathetic refrain of "Do not forget me."

The little song brought back the first evening when she had sung to me, and my eyes were dim with tears.

We all went home together, and we were all very happy, and that night in my dreams I saw again the wood on the hill-side, and the sweet violets there in all their fragrant beauty. And softly there came to me the memory of the child as I saw her then, with the flowers in her hand.

Sweet Violet, she still lies low at the foot of the Cross, and I am not afraid for her, for her Master's words come to me with power—"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

No earthly fame, no worldly praise shall touch her with its unhealthful influence, for He whom she loves and serves has pronounced her blessing, and He will keep her whom He has sheltered under His wings, faithful and safe unto the end.

THE END.

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